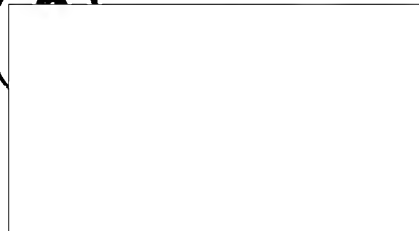




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Afghanistan Situation Report



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22 March 1983

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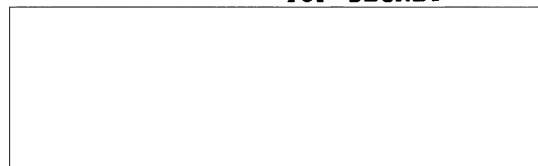
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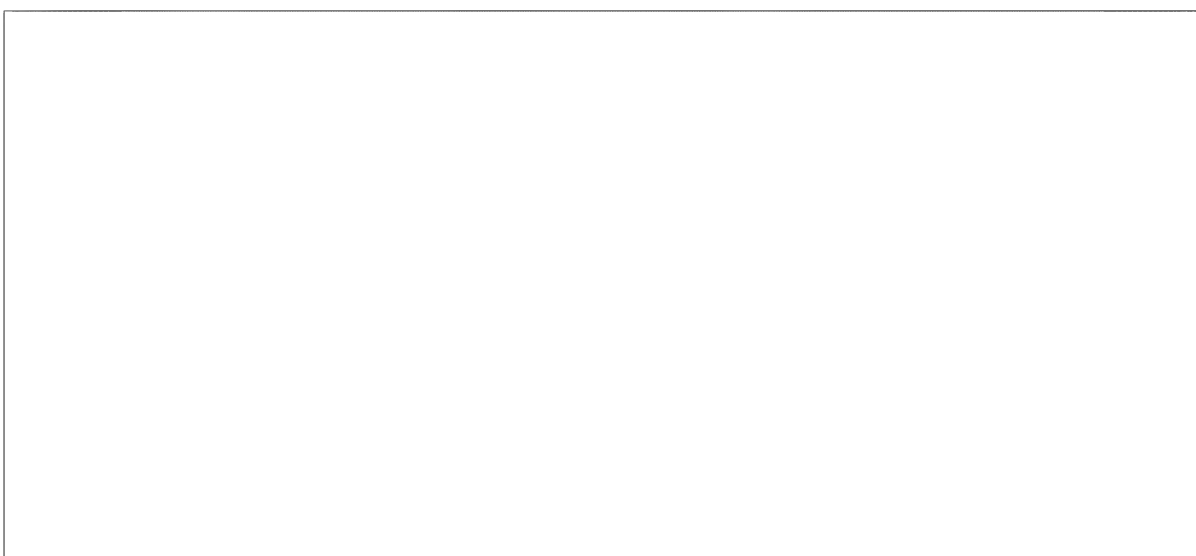
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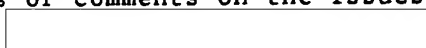
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A summary of the US Embassy, Moscow, assessment of the Soviets' Afghan policy. 

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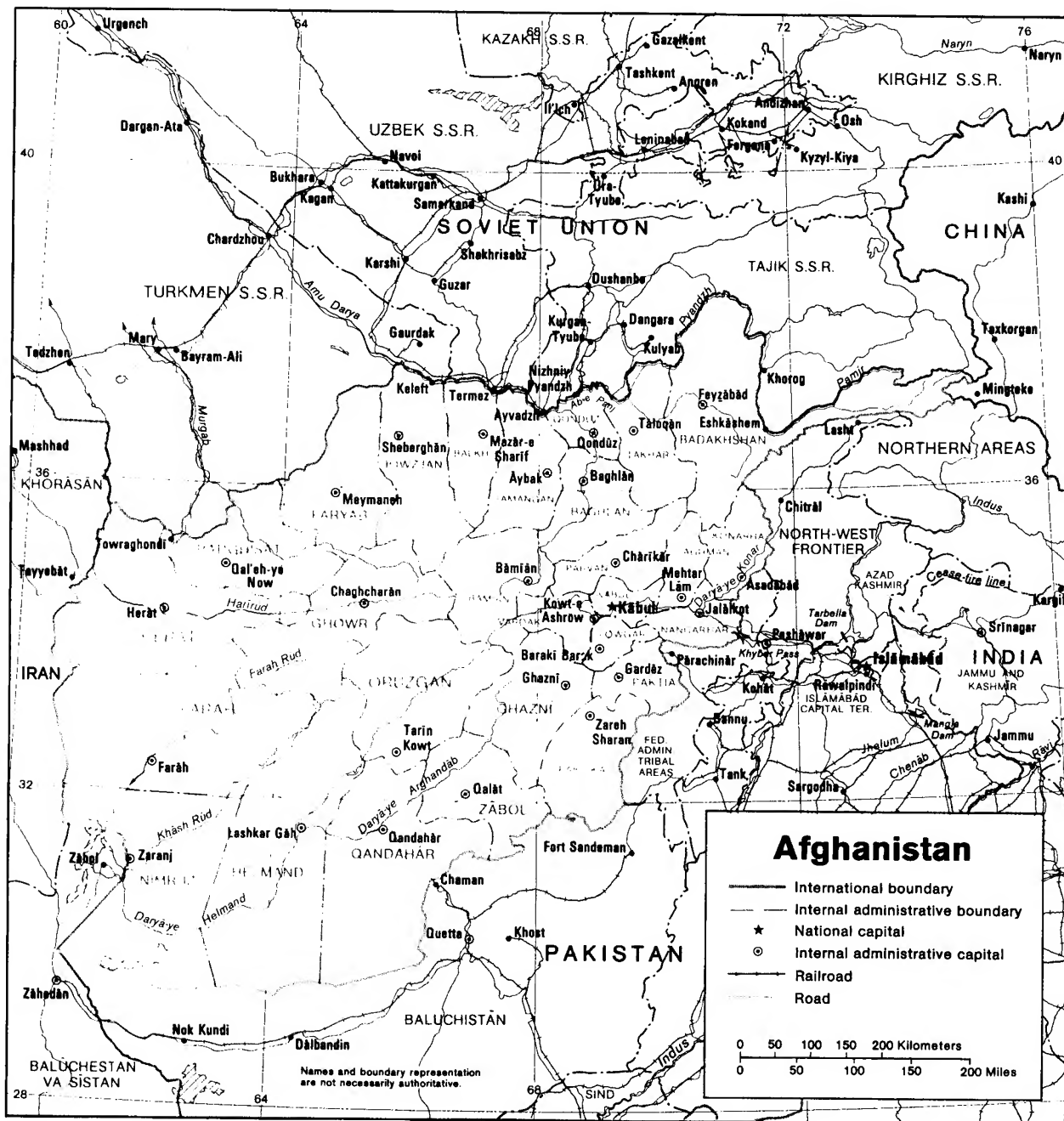


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IN BRIEF

-- [] the Afghan artillery regiment that withdrew from Rokheh two weeks ago is now at Anawa. The Soviet units formerly at Rokheh have not so far been observed elsewhere in the Panjsher Valley. []

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-- Abdul Wali, who has close ties to King Zahir Shah, has implied that the King would consider returning to Afghanistan as the head of a genuinely popular government after only a partial Soviet troop withdrawal, according to the Italian Foreign Ministry. The Italians have no evidence that the Soviets have contacted the King. Wali also plans to solicit Saudi funds and to sound out Pakistani authorities on a united resistance movement headed by the King. []

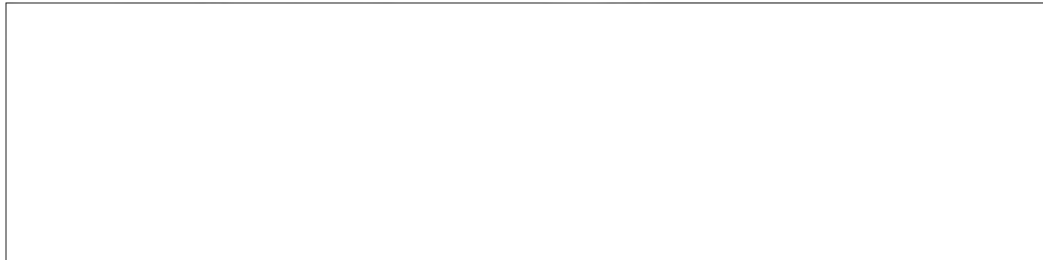
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
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-- French medical aid groups said that there are now 20 French doctors working in Afghanistan and the number may increase, according to press reports. Meanwhile, the US Embassy in Kabul reports that the recently sentenced French doctor Phillippe Augoyard may be released quickly if the French Communist Party provides publicity favorable to the DRA regime. 

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-- An insurgent leader has told French officials that the flight of Afghan civilians from Vardak Province west of Kabul has included the departure of nearly all educated people, leaving a void that the resistance cannot fill and serving Soviet strategy well. He indicated that educated Afghans should return and work in whatever way they can to assist the civilian population in the liberated areas. 

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-- Australia's decision to resume cultural, scientific, and other exchanges with the USSR was reported with unusual promptness by Pravda. The decision probably will be seen by Moscow as another sign that hostile foreign reactions to the invasion are dissipating and that international attitudes toward the continued occupation of Afghanistan are not a significant factor in Soviet policy decisions. 

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PERSPECTIVE

THE USSR IN AFGHANISTAN: DIM PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE

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As our feature this week, we present a summary of the views on this issue that have been offered by the US Embassy, Moscow.

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When UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar comes to Moscow on 28 March, we suspect that he will find the Soviets no more forthcoming on Afghanistan than they were last September. Andropov's accession has not changed Moscow's basic view of the costs and benefits of its presence in Afghanistan, and we thus view skeptically hints since November of new flexibility on the terms of a political settlement. Instead, we see signs of preparations for a long stay in Afghanistan. Moscow will probably continue UN efforts to find a solution to the Afghan problem but will make no meaningful concessions. Should the UN cease its efforts, the Soviets will seek to place the blame on the US.

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Withdrawal: Costs and Benefits

Based on our contacts here and the intelligence available to us, we judge that Soviet perceptions of the problem reflect the following considerations:

-- The military and economic burden of the war is manageable indefinitely at present levels. There is no significant domestic opposition to the war.

-- Afghanistan's strategic importance has increased since 1979 because US capabilities in the region have grown and the Soviet relationship with Tehran has continued to deteriorate.

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-- The foreign policy costs of the invasion are now seen as declining. Afghanistan has not prevented a limited rapprochement with China, seriously disrupted economic and political relations with Europe, or been the decisive factor in Soviet loss of leverage in the Islamic world.

-- There is little to gain in US-Soviet relations by a withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, and improved relations with China and Europe will be a function primarily of other issues.

-- Most important, a withdrawal from Afghanistan would risk a sharp increase in internal disorder on Soviet borders or establishment of an overtly hostile regime in Kabul. Either result would be seen as a major foreign policy defeat, which the Andropov regime--less well established than Brezhnev's--would be unlikely to accept.

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In light of these considerations, we have been skeptical of hints since Brezhnev's death of new Soviet interest in finding a way out of Afghanistan. We may, in fact, be seeing signs that the Soviets are moving in the opposite direction:

-- Recent Soviet media treatment of Afghanistan has shown more frequent coverage of that nation, with much less effort to minimize the difficulties facing the DRA. In fact, the importance of Soviet moral and material support for the ultimate success of the Revolution is being stressed heavily, and the Soviet combat role has recently been far more candidly depicted. Although these developments may represent Andropov's preference for greater openness, they seem to us more of an effort to prepare the populace for a prolonged effort in Afghanistan.

-- Afghan Defense Minister Qader's February visit to Moscow looked like the first step in a renewed effort to reinvigorate the Afghan armed forces. And Moscow's ambiguous press treatment of Babrak Karmal in recent months, coupled with recurrent rumors of efforts to find a more viable successor, seems to reflect a continuing Soviet effort to broaden the DRA's legitimacy and domestic support. To succeed, such efforts would require the long-term presence of Soviet forces.

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Some Conclusions


We surmise the following about the current Soviet attitude toward Afghanistan and Moscow's likely strategy for the months ahead:

-- The Soviets have probably concluded that it will take them far longer than they originally anticipated to ensure the survivability of a socialist-oriented client state.

-- The Soviets probably believe that they can attain their objectives if they are willing to persist.


-- Militarily, Moscow is probably going to continue a policy of maintaining control of Afghanistan's main cities and transportation routes, and of breaking up insurgent concentrations that threaten these goals.

-- Politically, they will continue efforts to broaden the DRA's domestic base and its international legitimacy.

-- Introduction of a significant number of additional forces is unlikely. 

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The UN Role

The Soviets will find it useful, as they have since December 1979, to appear to be engaged in efforts to achieve a settlement that would "permit" them to withdraw from Afghanistan. For now, Cordovez' mission fits this need well, and we expect Moscow to continue to support his efforts, perhaps even more openly than it has thus far. We seriously doubt, however, that they will be drawn into any commitments that would meet the demands of the guerrilla resistance or the UNGA mandate, and thereby begin a process leading toward political settlement and withdrawal. Should Cordovez weary of his efforts, the Soviets will seek to blame the US for his failure. 

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Implications for US Policy

In addition to continuing support for the Pakistanis and the insurgents, the most important task for the US in the months ahead will



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be to ensure that we are not perceived as an obstacle to a settlement --either by Cordovez or others. Close coordination with the UN and the major interested parties will be our best insurance against this. It will also be tactically useful to be seen as engaged in a continuing dialogue with Moscow on Afghanistan, though we should have no illusions that anything concrete will result from such a dialogue in the near future. We should be able to show that we are doing everything possible both to induce the Soviets to negotiate seriously and to dispel any notions that we do not, in fact, want them out of Afghanistan. In addition, should Moscow at some point conclude that its interests would best be served by a face-saving withdrawal, having an existing open channel will make it easier for them to signal this. As should be clear from the above, however, we do not think that point is near.

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(CIA/SOVA Comment: While in general agreement with Embassy Moscow's assessment, we believe it fails to indicate the new flexibility that the Andropov regime has tried to bring to the Afghanistan problem. For instance, the involvement of Soviet military officers in cease-fire negotiations with Afghan guerrillas for the first time was an important initiative of the new regime. Also, under Soviet stimulus, the Afghan Government appeared more flexible in dealing with UN negotiator Cordovez in order to keep his talks going, although without conceding any significant points. The Soviet search for new ways to pursue the war while holding off foreign political pressure probably will lead to further changes in Moscow's tactics, although the ultimate goal of maintaining control of Afghanistan is unlikely to change.)

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